German-speaking settlers in Western Australia

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GERMAN-SPEAKING SETTLERS
IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of Language Studies

Western Australian College
of Advanced Education
Mount Lawley Campus
1984
GERMAN-SPEAKING SETTLERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

I. Size of German-Speaking Community.

II. Motives and Mode of Migration.

III. Community Organizations and Activities.

IV. The German-Australian Student Exchange Society

v. The Lutheran Church.

Information by students of Interpreting and Translating (German) at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, Mount Lawley Campus.

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I. SIZE OF GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

The German-Speaking Community, in addition to all Germans, includes Austrians, Swiss and a number of immigrants from Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Ukraine and the Baltic States. This is because of the European political situation following the two World Wars. However, this information is concerned primarily with persons born in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The German Community in Western Australia grew very slowly.¹ In the year 1881 only 71 Germans lived in this State. This number increased to 1522 by the turn of the century and rose to 2036 by 1911. Due to World War I and the voluntary return of some settlers to Germany, the German-born population declined to a minimum of 656 in 1947, this decline being also influenced by the Second World War. At about this time (1947), the Australian Government became concerned about the nation's low population and decided to foster migration from the nations of Northern Europe including Austrians, Swiss and Germans. This produced a reversal of earlier trends and by 1954 the number of Germans in Western Australia had risen to 5361. This trend continued and reached 7076 in 1971 and 7431 in 1976.

At present there are about 14,000 German speakers in Western Australia, including those who emigrated from certain European nations other than Germany. Following is a breakdown between the three principal source nations :-

GERMANS

According to Profile 81, the Census of 1981, there are 8122 German-born persons resident in Western Australia. This represents 0.8% of the total population of Australia and 7.3% of all German-born people in Australia. The male/female ratio is approximately 50:50.

Of these 8122 persons, 7300 have been in Australia for over 5 years. Of the persons who have been here for 5 years and over 4000 use English only and some 3000 speak German and speak English well. Approximately 250 persons do not speak English at all.

¹ Information from various censuses from 1901-1981.
GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONS BORN IN GERMANY

TOTAL GERMAN POPULATION: 110,755

NORTHERN TERRITORY
1,035 (0.9%)

QUEENSLAND
12,768 (11.5%)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA
14,756 (13.3%)

NEW SOUTH WALES
35,105 (31.7%)

VICTORIA
34,335 (31.0%)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
8,122 (7.3%)

TASMANIA
1,935 (1.7%)

PROPORTION OF TOTAL AUSTRALIAN POPULATION: 0.8%
PROPORTION OF TOTAL OVERSEAS-BORN POPULATION: 3.5%

1. Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Profile '81 1981 Census Data on Persons born in Germany.

GERMAN COMMUNITY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

8,122
8,000
7,500
7,000
6,500
6,000
5,500
5,000
4,500
4,000
3,500
3,000
2,500
2,000
1,500
1,000
500

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONS BORN IN AUSTRIA

TOTAL POPULATION: 22,805

NORTHERN TERRITORY
178 (0.8%)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
1,456 (6.4%)

QUEENSLAND
1,910 (8.4%)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA
2,150 (9.4%)

NEW SOUTH WALES
8,746 (38.4%)

ACT
719 (3.2%)

VICTORIA
7,284 (31.9%)

TASMANIA
398 (1.7%)

PROPORTION OF TOTAL AUSTRALIA POPULATION: 0.2%

PROPORTION OF TOTAL OVERSEAS-BORN POPULATION: 0.7%

1. Profile 81
AUSTRIAN COMMUNITY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

There are 1456 persons born in Austria living in Western Australia (see graph below).

This figure represents 6.4% of all Austrians in Australia and 0.1% of the total population of Australia.

1350 have been in Western Australia for more than 5 years. Of those aged 15 years and over, 51.8% speak German and also English very well.

NOTE:

There were no statistics available for the years 1878, 1901, 1911, 1971 and 1976.
According to the 1981 Census there are 784 Swiss-born persons in Western Australia, representing some 0.06% of the total population of Australia. About 90% of these people speak English very well. Switzerland is a nation in which four languages are spoken and the learning of English is encouraged, particularly as it is necessary in the Swiss Hotel industry.

The largest concentration of German-speaking Swiss is in and around Perth. The second-largest is in the Pilbara region and the third-largest in the South West region of the State.

Most of the German-speaking Swiss are in the 30-54 years age group.¹

NOTE:
There were no statistics available for 1870, 1881, 1971 and 1976.

1. Information provided by David Zeller, Swiss Club, Perth, 1984.
II. MOTIVES AND MODE OF IMMIGRATION

The motives for and modes of immigration varied from time to time. The first Germans probably arrived around 1860 and about 1880 some Lutherans - among them Germans - came to Western Australia from South Australia.¹ They had heard about the gold discoveries and decided to try their luck. Sailors jumped ship and remained in Western Australia. Others came because of poor economic conditions in their native land, or just to start a new life in a different land. Migration continued slowly.

The second big migration wave occurred in the 1950s.² This was prompted by the devastation of large areas of Europe during the Second World War. Germany was in ruins with its economy almost at a standstill. Many with no home, no work and no hope decided to leave Germany. The majority opted for migration to America but some chose Australia.

Towards the end of the 1950s Australia bought a number of pre-fabricated houses from Austria³ and also hired tradesmen to erect the homes in Australia. Later the Australian Government also bought pre-fabricated houses from Germany, and as a result of this many Austrian and German tradesmen came to Australia originally on a two-year contract to erect the homes. On completion of their contracts, many of them decided to settle in Australia.

During the 1960s and 1970s - the time of the European economic boom - migrants came in a spirit of adventure or because there was still a housing shortage in Germany. Some sought a better life away from the stressful life in Europe. Until about 1961 German-speaking migrants came from East Germany as well as from West Germany, Austria and Switzerland. However after the erection of the Berlin Wall by the East German authorities in August 1961, any would-be emigrant from the German Democratic Republic

² H. Watzek, Rhein-Donau Club, Perth.
(East Germany) had to run the risk of being shot and killed by the East German border guards, so that migration to Australia from East Germany virtually ceased from then on. However, eight persons from Dresden, East Germany, arrived in Perth at the end of April 1984.\(^1\) They stated that the East German authorities were not as strict as they used to be.

Most of the Austrian and Swiss migrants came to Australia after the Second World War. During the last five years a lot of young job seekers came from Switzerland. Many of these returned home disappointed, being unable to find work owing to the serious unemployment situation in Western Australia. However, during the last two years, hardly any Swiss people migrated to Western Australia because in Switzerland the unemployment problem is minimal.\(^2\)

GERMAN BUSINESS MIGRANTS TO WESTERN AUSTRALIA

This programme which was inaugurated by the Federal Government a little over twelve months ago is seen as likely to lead to the rapid growth in Australia of a new entrepreneurial class. Although most interest in this programme has come from South East Asia - notably Hong Kong and Malaysia - it has not passed unnoticed among the industrialised nations of Europe and perhaps, especially, West Germany.

Already sixteen German businessmen have received the approval of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to set up in business in Western Australia and currently (June 1984) two more are receiving consideration. The total indicated capital inflow for these ventures is in excess of $Aust 9 Million. One of the criteria applying to this scheme is that the foreign businessman must be prepared to invest in excess of $250,000 in the proposed Australian business venture. Another criterion is that each scheme must indicate a potential for employment of local Australian labour.

\(^1\) E. Mech, Rhein-Donau Club, Perth, 1984.

BUSINESS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA CONNECTED WITH WEST GERMANY

According to the information given by the German Consulate (1983) there are some twenty-seven German firms in Western Australia and some are sole agents or distributors of, e.g. cars, trucks, electrical appliances, etc.

Apart from this, there are some seventy Australian firms and companies with German-speaking owners or staff in a variety of trades and fields including investment consulting, restaurants, bakeries, butcheries, electrical equipment, jewellery, leather goods and travel agencies.

The Club News of the Swiss Club, May/June 1984, lists some twenty-four Swiss businesses selling a range of products from Swiss health foods to clocks and watches.

References:


A. Munachen, Department of Immigration & Ethnic Affairs.

German Consultate, Information 1983.
III COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The Rhein Donau Club (Inc.), Perth, German-speaking Association and member of "The Bridge" Association of German-speaking clubs in Australia.

President: Mr. Dieter Ducke. 110 North Lake Road, Myaree, 6154.

The Rhein-Donau Club has a club house of its own with hall, restaurant, etc. It was established on 30 September 1958 and is an association for all speakers of German. It provides facilities for social activities, entertainment, recreation and education. Its objectives are to provide for the social needs of the community as well as to keep up the language, culture and customs. Presently (May 1984) the Club has about 1300 members, 40% of whom are not speakers of German, such as Poles, Czechs and Ukrainians and includes Australians.

The Club offers activities such as parties, balls and dances, Christmas parties and New Year's Eve parties, barbecues and National evenings. They have the following activity groups:

- Pistol Group
- Yoga Group
- Edelweiss Dancers
- Theatre Group
- Tabletennis Group
- Homeland Choir
- Gymnastics Group
- Carnivals Group
- Seniors Group.

They also hold German language classes and are trying to organise an "Entertainment Group".

The Rhein-Donau Club is very active in helping new migrants to settle down and find employment. They also answer inquiries from people in Germany who want to migrate to Australia.
The Rhein-Donau Club has formed a Care Group to look after aged Germans in the community. Members of the Group visit the elderly people periodically for a chat and check on their special needs. It is perhaps to be regretted that at present there is no Home for the Aged of the German-speaking community.

According to Kurt Ammerer of the Multicultural & Ethnic Affairs Department, discussions have been held regarding the provision of homes for the aged of various ethnic communities but no firm decisions have yet been arrived at.

The Club has plans to provide a home unit settlement for aged Germans at some future date. Under this scheme home units will be made available for purchase. It is intended to include a clinic within the homes complex for on-the-spot medical treatment.

The Oktoberfest in Perth

The first Oktoberfest (October Festival) in Perth was held on October 28, 1961 at the Claremont Showgrounds and was organized and directed by the Rhein-Donau Club of Perth. On this occasion the venue was the Cafeteria Pavilion. The function was attended by 6000 people.

Since that time the Oktoberfest has been an annual event and, with the exception of 1971, the venue has always been the Robinson Pavilion at the Claremont Showgrounds.

In 1971 by way of a change the Oktoberfest was held at the Kalamunda Oval and that year it attracted over 35,000 people. However, the Organizing Committee decided they did not wish to organize the function every year on such a big scale and it was decided to revert to the Claremont venue for future Oktoberfests. Since then attendances have fluctuated around an average figure of approximately 6000 people. Due to exceptionally bad weather in 1979 attendance was down to around 4000 people.

The Oktoberfest is held on the last Saturday in October and the first Saturday in November.
During the years 1979-1983 the Oktoberfest was organized by Mr. Karl Wolpers. Mr. Wolpers has now resigned from this position and it will now be the responsibility of the Club's Senior Vice-President, Mr. Guenther Endres, to organize and direct Oktoberfest 1984.

THE AUSTRALIAN GOETHE SOCIETY - WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BRANCH
Post Office Box 464, Subiaco, 6008. Telephone: 341-4745

The Goethe Society functions in close connection with the Goethe Institutes in the Eastern States and also the main Goethe Institute in Munich, West Germany.

The Western Australian Branch of the Goethe Society is a non-profit making society, the principal aims of which are the maintenance of the German culture in Western Australia and the teaching of the German language. The Society holds regular meetings featuring lectures by German specialists in their respective subjects and also occasionally shows films, all spoken in German. Discussions are also held periodically on a variety of subjects, including music, art and literature.

The Society possesses an extensive library located in Room 2.25, the Department of German, 2nd Floor of the Arts Building, University of Western Australia. The Library is well stocked with novels and magazines as well as with books of a more serious content. All are German-language publications. German newspapers, such as the 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung' are also available to members of the Goethe Society.

Social functions such as wine-tasting evenings are organized from time to time.

The Society also conducts German language classes at three levels, viz: (1) Beginners; (2) Intermediate Level; and (3) Advanced Level. The day-time class for Beginners is now held at Angove Street, North Perth and the evening classes for Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced students are held at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, Mount Lawley Campus. The language courses
lead to the German "Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache", a Certificate awarded by the Goethe Institutes all over the world.

Membership of the Goethe Society is open to anyone having an interest in German culture and history. Proficiency in the German language is NOT a prerequisite for membership although a working knowledge of the language is obviously an advantage.

In June 1984 the Western Australian Branch of the Goethe Society had a membership of about 150 and its President is Professor R. Haehnel.

**German Cultural Club of W.A.**

46 Mayfair Street, Mt. Claremont, 6010   Telephone: 384-8139

This Club was founded only a year ago. It is a private organization and not affiliated to the Goethe Institute. The principal aims of the Club are the fostering of interest in the German language and culture and the provision of a focal point where Germans and Australians can meet.

**Old Austria Club**

436 Staniland Street, Maddington, 6109   Telephone: 459-1747

The Old Austria Club was founded in 1970 and the current President is Mr. Matthias Krispler. The Club now owns its own facilities in Maddington, a southern suburb of Perth, and provides facilities for a variety of social and recreational activities.

Its principal aim is to maintain the Austrian culture in Western Australia and to provide a focal point where people of Austrian origin or indeed anyone interested in Austrian culture can meet and socialize. Membership, therefore, is also open to people not of Austrian birth.

The present membership of the Old Austria Club stands at approximately 300. Unlike the Rhein-Donau Club of whose membership some 40% are non-German speakers, practically the entire membership of the Old Austria Club is German-speaking.
In addition to having its own choir, the Club maintains a Dance Group, Golf Group and a Senior Citizens' Group.

This latter Group meets periodically in the Club. To date the need to form a Care Group to visit elderly and infirm Austrians in their homes has not arisen.

A friendly liaison is maintained between the Rhein Donau and Swiss Clubs. A group from the Old Austria Club generally attends the annual Swiss Ball on the Swiss National Day, 4 August.

Swiss Club of Western Australia Inc.

Post Office Box 328, Cloverdale 6105

The Club has get-togethers every month. These are now held at the Rhein Donau Club. On 2 November 1984 the Swiss Club will celebrate its eighth birthday. The current President is Mr. D. Zeller.

Radio 6NR - Perth's Ethnic Radio Station

Radio 6NR commenced broadcasting in 1975 and is funded by the Ethnic Broadcasting Commission. It now caters for a range of ethnic groups in Western Australia including the German-speaking community. Broadcasts for the German community commenced in 1975 and are now on air between 1.00-2.00 p.m. each Sunday afternoon.

The German programmes cover a variety of items including music, short stories and, of course, news items from the 'Heimatland'. The German hour is funded by the Rhein-Donau Club of Perth. It is a surprisingly good programme when one considers that the radio programme committee consists of only one person - Mr. Klaus Adam!

As there is no possibility of being able to further expand the German language programme on Station 6NR, the Ethnic Broadcasting Commission is looking into the possibility of developing a new FM station. However any decision concerning this could still be some way into the future.
Every Thursday at 8.30 p.m. you can hear "The Voice of Austria" and Swiss Migrant Radio is on air every Tuesday at 7.00 p.m.

The German-Australian Student Exchange Society

Organizers in Western Australia: Ms. Giselle Birch - Telephone: 420-4759
W.A. Department of Education
Ms. Dale Cornell

This Society's sole purpose is the organization and supervision of the German-Australian Student Exchange Scheme.

Scholarships are made available every year in Western Australia to cover the costs of sending those linguistically promising Western Australian students to West Germany with the aim of improving the students' proficiency in the German language.

The beneficiaries of the Scholarships are Year 12 Secondary School students with an average age of seventeen years. They generally spend three months in Germany between December and March. They are boarded with a German family who have at least one child of about the same age as the Australian student. While in Germany, students are expected to attend a German school, to read German-language newspapers and generally take advantage of all opportunities to improve their proficiency in the German language. They are not required, however, to complete any homework set by the schools which they attend.

The Scholarships are provided by the following bodies:

- Western Mining Corporation - one Scholarship
- Rhein-Donau Club - one Scholarship
- German-Australian Society - one Scholarship.

There is a corresponding interchange of German students of similar age groups to Western Australia. The students spend ten to eleven weeks in Western Australia during July to September, the period that corresponds with the long summer School Holidays in Germany, and are boarded by Western Australian families who have children of High School age. The West German students are expected to attend
a Western Australian High School for at least four days per week but are not required to undertake any set homework. They are naturally encouraged to read local newspapers and magazines in order to assist their mastery of the English language.

It is reported that this Scheme is working quite satisfactorily.

Reference: Ms. Dale Cornell  
Hon. Secretary  
Australian-German Society for Student Exchange.
The Lutheran Church had its origin in Germany in the sixteenth century and in Australia it was first established by a group of German settlers in Hahndorf in the Barossa Valley of South Australia about 1838. In 1880 a number of German families moved from South Australia to Western Australia and, together with a few other migrants from Europe, established a Lutheran congregation in Western Australia. Notable among the first settlers was a group of farmers who trekked together from South Australia to the Katanning district. One still finds many of their descendants owning farms in this area.

In 1901 Pastor E. Fischer became the first resident pastor in Perth and he also founded Lutheran communities in Fremantle, Kalgoorlie and Albany. By 1903 about 120 families had been contacted in Perth and surrounding districts. Soon sufficient funds were available to acquire a property and build a church in Fitzgerald Street, North Perth, which was given the name of St. John's. A Christian Day-School was added. In 1909, thirty-six pupils attended this school which also had a small orphanage attached to it. Unfortunately the school and orphanage were closed in 1910 when Pastor Fischer was called to another congregation in Victoria.

Frequent changes in the ministry followed until Pastor R.M. Graebner arrived in 1914. While Pastor Fischer was the first minister who overcame all the initial hardships in the establishment of the new Lutheran congregation, the further growth and development of St. John's has largely centred around the ministry of Pastor Graebner. He looked after the Lutheran community for 52 years until his retirement in 1966. Even after this, he continued to serve many people in the German language until 1973.

The 1914-18 War brought many hardships to the Lutherans because of their German ancestry. As a result quite a number returned to Europe after the War. Others drifted away from the church.
to avoid the stigma of belonging to a "German" church. Nevertheless a small band of members remained together and after some years membership gradually increased again.

In 1982 it became possible for the Lutheran congregation to purchase a property in Aberdeen Street, North Perth. The old property in Fitzgerald Street was sold and, after overcoming many financial difficulties, a new church was finally opened in 1936. Later a hall was added and at this time there were forty-one families in the congregation. This church has become the centre of the Lutheran community in Western Australia.

During the Second World War and for several years following it, the Lutheran congregation again experienced a difficult time. It did, however, receive some encouragement and support through the involvement of Australian and American servicemen who were stationed in Western Australia at that time.

In 1949 the prospects of the Lutheran church changed with the arrival of migrants from war-torn Europe. The church was filled to capacity, firstly with the coming of a group of Displaced Persons mainly from the Baltic countries and Hungary and later, after 1954, new migrants from Germany joined the congregation. According to church statistics of 1975, membership included 678 baptised members, 366 confirmed members and 710 persons under spiritual care.

Owing to the fact that many migrants of different nationalities are members of the Lutheran Church, it was possible to gradually establish independent congregations for the Latvians, Hungarians and Finns/Estonians. All have their own church centres now and pastors who conduct services in their own languages as well as in English.

In regard to the German language, the first services in the history of the church were mainly held in the German language because most worshippers were at that time of German descent. During the wars preaching in German was discontinued and replaced by services held in the English language. However, for the past thirty-five years, a service has always been
conducted once a month in German, firstly by Pastor Graebner and later by Pastor Kemeny, who came to Australia from Hungary.

Nowadays the attendance at German services is on the decline. Only a few elderly people are now interested with the exception of Christmas time when more Germans like to celebrate by attendance at a German-language service. However, future prospects for regular services in the German language are not promising.

With the increase of membership of the Lutheran Church in the Perth metropolitan area it was possible to build a second church centre at Morley in 1972. The present Pastor is the Reverend Shulz. This church centre is called the Bethlehem Congregation and statistics at the end of 1975 showed that it had 266 baptised members, 107 confirmed members and 107 contacts.

There is also a Lutheran Church in Lynwood with Pastor Schulze at its head. Regular meetings and services are also held in Anglican halls in Coolbellup, Medina and Rockingham.

As Pastor Pietsch, who is at present Pastor of St. John's in Perth, pointed out, Lutherans are also taken care of in distant country districts of Western Australia. Church services and meetings take place in Merredin, Northam, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Collie, Geraldton, Morawa, Esperance, Albany, Katanning, Narrogin and Canna. The larger townships like Northam, Katanning and Albany have a Lutheran community which is strong enough to support their own Pastors and maintain their own church buildings. Others are attended by visiting Pastors.

Like other Christian churches, the Lutheran Church is not only concerned with the spiritual welfare of its members. Social meetings and outings are encouraged by various groups, e.g. the Youth Fellowship and the Women's Guild.

There is no official welfare programme carried out by the Lutheran Church in Western Australia. Of course collections are often held to support worthy causes. Larger congregations in the Eastern States are able to maintain their own welfare agencies, as can also be found in the much wealthier and more numerous establishments.
of the Catholic and Anglican Churches. However a Special Investment Fund is set aside by St. John's Church for cases of hardship. A Youth Team of the Lutheran Church has set up a Task Force to help unemployed people.

Reference:
Anniversary Souvenir Brochure
St. John's Lutheran Church,